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SPEECH  
OF  
CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS  
OF MASSACHUSETTS

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DECEMBER 22, 1902

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AT THE BANQUET OF THE  
NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY  
OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA.



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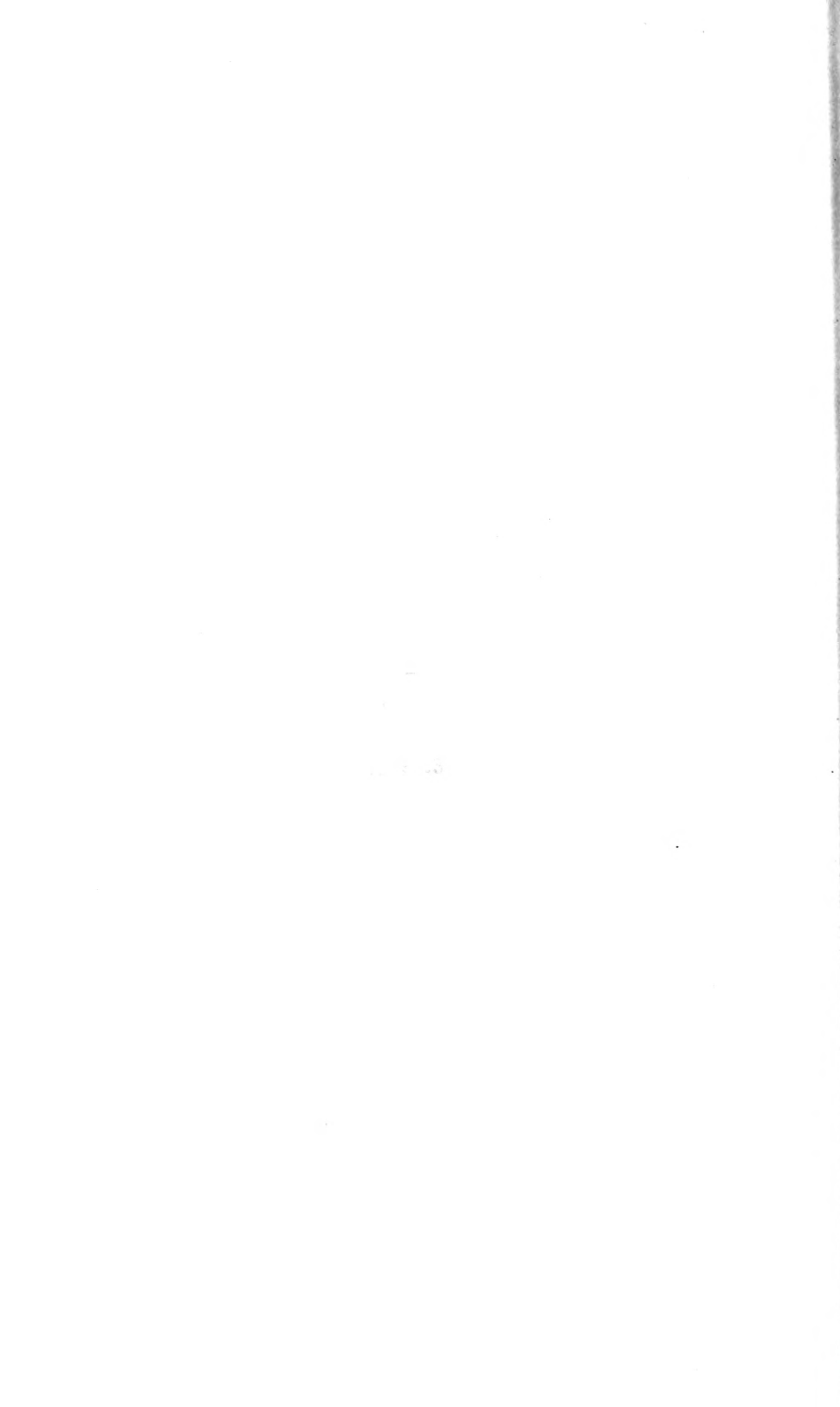
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## “ANATHU”

Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the New England Society of Charleston: —

Though this is a Yule-tide festival, being, by descent at least, a Puritan, I shall, after the fashion of the Puritans, open with a text, thence proceeding to “improve the occasion.” If you will turn to the twelfth chapter of Exodus, you will there find it written: —

“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.

“And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?

“That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians.

“Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.

“And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.”

As it was of old with the children of Israel, even so is it now with us of New England; and, when our children say unto us, what mean you by this service, we say unto them, it is the feast of the passover, when our fathers, having passed over the ocean, set foot in the promised land. A day of retrospection, it is a day also of reckoning, — a day meet for reflection. I propose so to utilize it this evening. Discussing grave topics gravely, I crave patience.

Two hundred and sixty-four years ago a schism, since become historic, occurred in the infant colony of Massachusetts Bay. It was rent in twain; and so, as the Father of Massachusetts has

recorded, "finding, upon consultation that two so opposite parties could not continue in the same body without apparent hazard to the ruin of the whole, [those in the majority] agreed to send away some of the principal." And again, "by the example of Lot in Abraham's family, and after Hagar and Ishmael, he [Gov. John Winthrop] saw they must be sent away." Those thus proscribed went accordingly into banishment; and so, by another passover, Rhode Island came into existence. This was in 1638; and, in 1640, the chief of those thus thrust into exile having occasion to write to the magistrate who had enforced the order of banishment, said, with a pathos reached only by words of simplicity, "what myself and wife and family did endure in that removal, I wish neither you nor yours may ever be put unto"; but again, and at almost the same time, writing from his new home in Newport, Gov. William Coddington expressed to Gov. John Winthrop the approval he felt "of a speech of one of note amongst you, that we were in a heate and chafed, and were all of us to blame; in our strife we had forgotten that we were brethren."

The expression is apt; the admission appropriate. More, much more than two years ago, — longer ago than the lifetime of a generation, — Massachusetts and South Carolina got in "a heate and chafed" one with the other, and fell into bitter strife. Forgetting that we were brethren, were we also "all of us to blame"?

Not long since, circumstances led me into a dispassionate re-examination of the great issues over which the country divided in the mid-years of the last century. As a result thereof, I said in a certain Phi Beta Kappa Society address delivered in June, at Chicago, copies of which some of you may have seen, — "legally and technically, — not morally, again let me say, and wholly irrespective of humanitarian considerations, — to which side did the weight of argument incline during the great debate which culminated in our Civil War? \* \* \* If we accept the judgment of some of the more modern students and investigators of history, — either wholly unprejudiced or with a distinct Union bias, — it would seem as if the weight of argument falls into what I will term the Con-



federate scale." And I then referred to some recent utterances of Prof. Goldwin Smith and Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge. Incited by those utterances to yet further inquiry of my own, the result thereof was, to me at least, curious : — suggestive of moralizing, and moralizing, too, of a sort highly appropriate for the Passover period.

The question is now one purely historic ; but on that question of the weight of authority and argument as respects the right of secession, I found a divergence of opinion existing to-day so great as hardly to admit of reconciliation. On the one side it was — I am told still is — taught as an article of political faith that not only was the right of peaceable secession at will plain, manifest, and expressly reserved, but that, until a comparatively recent period, it had never been even disputed. In the words of one writer of authority — "through a period of many years, the right of secession was not seriously questioned in any quarter except under the exigencies of party politics." On the other hand, in the section of the country where my lot has been cast, this alleged heresy is sternly denounced, and those propounding it are challenged to their proofs. With equal positiveness it is claimed that, from the time of the adoption of the Constitution down to a comparatively recent day, "there was not a man in the country who thought or claimed that the new system was anything but a perpetual Union."

Which contention, I asked, is right? And separating myself from my present environment, I tried to go back to the past, and to see things, not as they now are, but as they were ; as they appeared to those of three generations gone, — to the fathers, in short, of our grandfathers. It was a groping after forgotten facts and conditions in places dark and unfamiliar. The results reached, also, were, I confess, very open to question. But, while more or less curious, as well as unexpected, they were such as a Massachusetts man, forty years ago at this time in arms for the Union, need not hesitate to set forth in South Carolina, where the right of secession, no longer proclaimed as a theory, was first resorted to as a fact.

It was Alexander Pope, hard on two centuries ago (1733), who wrote : —

“Manners with fortunes, humors turn with climes,  
Tenets with books, and principles with times.”

And, again, Tennyson in our day has said : —

“The drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by the veil.  
Who knows the ways of the world, how God will bring them about?  
Our planet is one, the suns are many, the world is wide.  
We are puppets, Man in his pride, and Beauty fair in her flower;  
Do we move ourselves, or are moved by an unseen hand at a game  
That pushes us off from the board, and others ever succeed?”

As I delved into the record, I concluded that humors turned quite as much with climes in the nineteenth century as they did in the eighteenth; and that, in the later as in the earlier period, principles, so called, bore a very close relation to times. We, too, had also been “puppets” moved by “an unseen hand at a game.” As, in short, I pursued my inquiries, the individual became more and more minimized; chance and predestination cut larger figures; and, at last, it all assumed the form of a great fatalistic process, from which the unexpected alone was sure to result.

But to come to the record. For more than a century, lawyers, jurists and publicists, — journalists, politicians and statesmen, — have been arguing over the Federal Constitution. Sovereignty carries with it allegiance. Wherein rested sovereignty? Was it in the State or in the Nation? Was the United States a unit, — “an indissoluble Union of imperishable States,” — or was it a mere confederacy of nations, held together solely by a compact upon possible infringements of which each one, so far as it was concerned, was a final judge? Each postulate has been maintained from the beginning; for that matter, is maintained still. Each has been argued out with great legal acumen and much metaphysical skill to results wholly satisfactory to those that way inclined; and yet absolutely illogical and absurd to the faithful of the other side. It was the old case of the shield of the silver and golden sides. That the two sides were irreconcilable made no difference. Be it silver

or gold, the thing to him who had eyes to see was in his sight silver or gold, as the case might be. And yet, as I pursued my inquiries, I gradually felt assured, not that the thing was in this case either silver or gold, but that it was both silver and gold. Everybody, in short, was right; no one wrong. Conditions changed, and with them not only appearances but principles, and even facts. The inevitable and unexpected had occurred.

This I propose for my thesis.

In dealing with these questions the lawyers, I find, start always with the assumption that, at a given time in the past, to wit, at or about 1788, there was in the thirteen States, then soon to become the present United States, a definite consensus of public opinion, which found expression in a written compact, since known as the Federal Constitution. But was this really the case? Public opinion, so called, is a very elusive and uncertain something, signifying things different at different times and in different places. Especially was this the case in the States of the old Federation. So far as I can ascertain, every State of the Federation became a member of the Union with mental reservations, often unexpressed, growing out of local traditions and interests, in the full and correct understanding of which the action of each must be studied. Dissatisfied with the past and doubtful of the future, jealous of liberties, to the last degree provincial and suspicious of all external rule, intensely common-sensed, but illogical and alive with local prejudice, the one thing our ancestry united in most apprehending was a centralized government. From New Hampshire to Georgia such a government was associated with the idea of a foreign regime. The people clung to the local autonomy, — the Sovereignty of the State. With this fundamental fact the framers of the Constitution had to deal. And they did so, in my opinion, with consummate skill. Accepting things as they were, they went as far as they could, leaving the outcome to time and the process of natural growth. The immediate result was a nation founded on a metaphysical abstraction, — a condition of unstable equilibrium. It could not endure. But the great mass of people

composing a community — Lincoln's "plain people" — are not metaphysicians, and do not philosophize. Loving to argue, in argument they are not logical. Even in Virginia they were not then all abstractionists; and, while, in a vague way, the Virginians wanted to become part of one people, they never proposed to cease to be Virginians, or to permit Virginia to become other than a Sovereign State. It was so with the others.

Confronted with this fact, what did the framers of the Constitution propose? Taking refuge in metaphysics, they proposed a contradiction in terms — a divided sovereignty. Sovereignty, it was argued, was in the People. But who are the People? The People of the United States, it was replied, are the aggregate of those inhabiting the particular States. Then they began to apportion sovereignty, oblivious of the fact that sovereignty does not admit of apportionment. Pursuing some vague analogy of the solar system, and conceiving of States as planets in their orbits, the People of the particular States assigned to the Nation a modicum of sovereignty, conferred another modicum on the State governments, and reserved whatever remained to themselves. Now it is written, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." The everlasting truth of this precept in the fulness of time held good in our case. From the moment the fathers sought to divide the indivisible, the result was written on the wall. It was a mere question of years and of might. Sovereignty had to be somewhere, and accepted as being there.

Thus, intentionally by some of the most far-seeing, unintentionally by others anxious to effect only a more perfect union, a pious fraud was in 1788 perpetrated on the average American, and his feet were directed into a path which inevitably led him to the goal he least designed for his journey's end. \*

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\* "The convention framed a constitution by the adoption of which thirteen peoples imagining themselves still independent and sovereign, really acknowledged themselves to be but parts of a single political whole. But they made this acknowledgment unconsciously. They continued to think of themselves as sovereigns who indeed permitted an agent to exercise some of their functions for them, but who had not abdicated their

“Through the Valley of Love I went,  
 In the loveliest spot to abide,  
 And just on the verge where I pitched my tent,  
 I found Hate dwelling beside.”

The bond was deceptive; for, on this vital point of ultimate sovereignty,—To whom was allegiance due in cases of direct issue and last resort?—on this crucial point of points the Constitution was not self-explanatory,—explicit. Nor was it meant to be. The framers—that is, the more astute, practical and far-seeing—went as far as they dared. The difficulty—the contradiction involved—was explicitly, and again and again, pointed out. It is impossible to believe that a man so intellectually acute as Hamilton failed to see the inherent weakness of the plan proposed. He did see it; but, under existing conditions, it was, from his point of view, the best attainable. Madison, though a man of distinctly constructive mind, was also an abstractionist. He seems really to have had faith in the principle of an unstable political equilibrium. At a later day, that faith was put to a rude test; and, in 1814, while the Hartford Convention was in session, the scales fell from his eyes. He had all he wanted of a divided sovereignty in practical operation. Lawyers, meanwhile, have since argued on this point; philosophers and publicists have refined over it; historians have analyzed the so-called original materials of history; and men with arms in their hands have fought the thing to a final result. Nevertheless, the real facts in the case seem quite clear, and altogether otherwise than they are usually assumed to have been.

When the Federal Constitution was framed and adopted,—“an indestructible Union of imperishable States,”—what was the law of treason,—to what or to whom, in case of final issue, did the average citizen owe allegiance? Was it to the Union, or to his State? As a practical question, seeing things as they then were,

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thrones. If the constitution had contained a definite statement of the actual fact; if it had said that to adopt it was to acknowledge the sovereignty of the one American people, no part of which could sever its connections from the rest without the consent of the whole, it would probably have been rejected by every State in the Union.” J. P. Gordy, *Political Parties in the United States* (Edition 1900), vol. i, p. 79.

—sweeping aside all incontrovertible legal arguments and metaphysical disquisitions, — I do not think the answer admits of doubt. If put in 1788, or indeed at any time anterior to 1825, the immediate reply of nine men out of ten in the Northern States, and of ninety-nine out of a hundred in the Southern States, would have been that, as between the Union and the State, ultimate allegiance was due to the State.

A recurrence to the elementary principles of human nature tells us that this would have been so, and could have been no otherwise. We have all heard of a famous, much-quoted remark of Mr. Gladstone to the effect that the Constitution of the United States was the most wonderful piece of constructive work ever wrought by man at a single effort. This may or may not be so. I do not propose to controvert it here and now; but, however wonderful, it would have been more than wonderful, it would have been distinctly miraculous, had it on the instant so wrought on men as at once to transfer the allegiance and affection of those composing thirteen distinct communities from their old traditional governments to one newly improvised. The thing hardly admits of discussion. The change was political and far-reaching; but it produced no immediate effect on the feelings of the people. As well say that the union of the crowns of Scotland and England immediately broke up Scotch clanship. It did break it up; but the process was continuous through one hundred and fifty years. The union was a fact; but its consequences no Campbell nor Cameron foresaw. So with us in 1788, allegiance to State had only a few years before proved stronger than allegiance to the Crown or to the Confederation, and no one then was "foolish enough to suppose that" the executive of the Union "would dare enforce a law against the wishes of a sovereign and independent State"; the very idea was deemed "preposterous." "That this new government, this upstart of yesterday, had the power to impose its edicts on unwilling States was a political solecism to which they could in no wise assent." \*

\* Gordy, *Political Parties in the United States*, vol. i, pp. 203, 341.

I am sure that all this was so in 1788. I am very confident it remained so until 1815. I fully believe it was so, though in less degree, until at least 1830. A generation of men born in the Union had then grown up, supplanting the generations born and brought up in the States. Steam and electricity had not yet begun to exert their cementing influence; but time, sentiment, tradition, — more, and most of all, the intense feeling excited North and South by our naval successes under the national flag in the war of 1812, — had in 1815 in large part done their work. The sense of ultimate allegiance was surely, though slowly as insensibly, shifting from the particular and gravitating to the general, — from the State to the Union. It was not a question of law, or of the intent of the fathers, or the true construction of a written instrument; for, on that vital point, the Constitution was silent, — wisely, and, as I hold it, intentionally silent. In studying the history of that period, we are again confronted by a condition and not a theory; but, as I read the record and understand the real facts of that now-forgotten social and political existence, in case of direct and insoluble issue between sovereign State and sovereign Nation between 1788 to 1861, every man was not only free to decide, but had to decide for himself; and, whichever way he decided, he was right. The Constitution gave him two masters. Both he could not serve; and the average man decided which to serve in the light of sentiment, tradition and environment. Of this I feel as historically confident as I can feel of any fact not matter of absolute record or susceptible of demonstration.

I have already referred to the academic address I some months ago had occasion to deliver. In response to it I received quite a number of letters, one of which, bearing on this point, seemed very notable. It was from the president of an historic Virginia college, who himself bears an historic Virginia name. In the address alluded to I had said that, “however it may have been in 1788, in 1860 a nation had grown into existence.” This I take to be indisputable. In no way denying the fact, my correspondent, quoting the words I have given, thus wrote: “But is it not

true that this nationality was after all a Northern nationality? Did the South share in it to any extent? On the contrary, the Confederate character of the Union was more strongly impressed upon the South in 1861 than in 1788. So that it may be more truly said that the Secessionists' recourse in 1861 was to peaceable separation, and not to the sword. If the North was really the only national part of the Union, and its national character reached out after the South, must not the responsibility for the use of the sword be visited upon the North, and not on the South? Both North and South started out from the same constitutional standpoint of secession; but, while the South adhered to the same idea, the North fused into a nation, which, in 1861, determined to conquer the other and conservative part. That the South had ever suffered *nationalization* in spirit or in fact, previous to 1861, I think your address clearly disproves."

Again, Tennyson's "unseen hand at a game"! — a game in which we are "puppets." But, after all, what is that "unseen hand"? And how did it manifest itself in our national life during the three-fourths of a century, between 1788 and 1861? That "unseen hand," theologically known as an "inscrutable providence," I take to be nothing more nor less than those material, social, industrial and political conditions, domestic and public, which, making up our environment, mould our destiny with no very great regard for our plans, our hopes, our traditions or our aspirations. All of which is merely our nineteenth century agnostical way of putting the fifteenth century aphorism that "Man proposes, but God disposes." With a political instinct which now seems marvellous, Madison, in the course of debate in the constitutional convention of 1788, casting a prophetic glance into futurity, said: "The great danger to our general government is, that the Southern and Northern interests of the continent are opposed to each other, not from their difference of size, but from climate, and principally from the effects of their having or not having slaves. Defensive power ought to be given, not between the large and small states, but between the Northern and South-



ern." And again, "The greatest danger is disunion of the States"; and, "It seems now well understood that the real difference of interests lies, not between the large and small, but between the Northern and Southern States." Based on this line of broad difference, the contest was "between the fear of the centripetal and the fear of the centrifugal force in the system." On the other side of the Atlantic, a shrewd observer and pioneer economist, profoundly opposed to the British policy during our War of Independence, had thus, shortly before, cast a horoscope of the American people, "The mutual antipathies and clashing interests of the Americans, their difference of governments, habitudes and manners, indicate that they will have no centre of union and no common interest. They never can be united into one common empire under any species of government whatever; a disunited people to the end of time, suspicious and distrustful of each other, they will be divided and sub-divided into little commonwealths or principalities, according to the natural boundaries, by great bays of the seas and by vast rivers, lakes, and ridges of mountains." \*

Into the details of the conflict over sovereignty which dragged along for seventy years, it is needless for me here to enter. A twice-told tale, I certainly have no new light to cast upon it; but in reviewing it recently, that aspect of it which has impressed me was its resemblance to the classic. Throughout Fate, the inevitable, "the unseen hand," are everywhere now apparent, — destiny had to be fulfilled. In connection with the history of those momentous years, we read much of men; and, indeed, it is a galaxy of great names, — Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Marshall, Madison, Webster, Calhoun: — but, as I went back to the deeper underlying influences, — the profound currents of thought and action which in the end worked results, — one and all those bearing even these names became Tennyson's "puppets" moved by the "unseen hand at the game." In this respect our

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\* Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, quoted by Bancroft, *History of the Formation of the Constitution*, i, 65.

story is suggestive of some cosmic theory, — the process by which suns and planets and satellites are evolved; — and gradually it seems as if the individual man were able to affect the course of events and final results as respects the outcome of the one as much as he does of the other. The elaborate legal arguments, the metaphysical theories and historical disquisitions, — even the rights and wrongs of the case, — became quite immaterial, and altogether insignificant. In obedience to underlying influences, and in conformity with natural laws, a system is crystallizing. Discordant elements blend; assimilation, willing or reluctant, goes on.

See how the sides change — how rapidly “humors turn with climes”; while, as to the principles involved, the mutation is only less complete than sincere. Nationality, as we see it to-day, had its birth in Virginia; and the Sovereignty of the Union assumed shape through the agency of Washington and was slowly perfected by Marshall, both more or less consciously responding to a natural movement, and working in harmony with it. Next, Virginia, and her offspring Kentucky, are passing the resolutions of 1798, and arraying themselves under the standard of decentralization. The government then passes into the hands of the protestants; and, almost at once, again in response to an underlying, unseen influence too strong to resist, the process of a more complete crystallization enters on a new phase; and, as it does so, catholic suddenly becomes protestant, and while Federalist New England formally pronounces the Union at an end, Jeffersonian Virginia supplies fresh aliment to nationality.

Meanwhile, the “unseen hand” is again at work, and the “puppets” duly respond. They thought, and we once thought, they were free agents. Not at all. In the light of development it is clear to us now that they merely went through their motions in obedience to influences of the mere existence of which they were at most but vaguely conscious. The drama was drawing insensibly to a crisis; the forces were arraying themselves in opposing ranks on the lines forecast by Madison in 1788. With

much confidence I assert, in its fundamentals there was no right or wrong about it; it was an inevitable, irrepressible conflict,—the question of sovereignty was to be decided, and either side could offer good ground, historical and legal, for any attitude taken in regard to it. That shield did actually have a silver as well as a golden side.

Historically speaking, from the close of our second War of Independence,—commonly known as that of 1812,—the ebb and flow of the great currents of influence had set in new and definite channels. Gradually they assumed irresistible force therein. Side by side two civilizations—a Chang and Eng—were developing. North of the Potomac and the Ohio a community was taking shape the whole tendency of which was national. Very fluid in its elements, commercial and manufacturing in its diversified industries, it was largely composed of Europeans or their descendants, who, knowing little of States, cared nothing for State Sovereignty, which, indeed, like the unknown God to the Greeks, was to them: foolishness. This vast discordant migration the railroad, the common school and the newspaper were rapidly merging, coalescing and fusing into a harmonious whole. Naturally it found a mouthpiece; and that mouthpiece preached Union. It was not exactly a consistent utterance; for, less than a score of years before, the same voice had been loud and emphatic in behalf of State Sovereignty. But manners change with fortunes, and principles with times.

So much for Chang, north of the Potomac and the Ohio; but with Eng, south of those streams, it was altogether otherwise. Under the influence of climate, soil, and a system of forced African labor the Southern States irresistibly reverted to the patriarchal conditions, becoming more and more agricultural; and, as is always the case with agricultural races and patriarchal communities, they clung ever more closely to their traditions and local institutions. Then it was that Calhoun, the most rigid of logicians, in obedience to an irresistible influence of the presence and power of which he was unconscious,—Calhoun, the unionist of the War

of 1812 and protectionist of 1816, turned to the Constitution; he began that "more diligent and careful scrutiny into its provisions, in order to ascertain fully the nature and character of our political system." Needless to say, he there found what he was in search of. But a similar scrutiny was at the same time going on in New England. As a result of the two scrutinies, Chang and Eng both changed sides. Before, Chang's side of the shield was gold, while that of Eng was silver; now, Chang saw quite clearly that it was silver after all, while Eng recognized it as burnished gold of the purest stamp. Both were honest, and both fully convinced. Both also were right; the simple truth being that no man can serve two masters, and two masters the fundamental law prescribed. The inevitable ensued.

But what was the inevitable? That again, as I read the story of our development, was purely a matter of circumstance and time. Fate, — the Greek necessity, — intervened in those lists and decided the issue of battle. To my mind, the record is from its commencement absolutely clear on one point. After the 25th of July, 1788, when the last of the nine States necessary to the adoption of the Federal Constitution acted favorably thereon, a withdrawal from the Union, all theories to the contrary notwithstanding, became practically an issue of might. Into the abstract question of right I will not enter, — least of all here and now. But, conceding everything that may be asked on the point of abstract right, — looking only on imperfect and illogical man as he is, and as he acts in this world's occasions and exigencies, — I adhere on this point to my own belief. In 1790 Rhode Island was spared from being "coerced" into the Union only by a voluntary, though very reluctant, acceptance of it; and from that day to 1861 any attempted withdrawal from the Union would, after long argument over the question of right, have ultimately resolved itself into an issue of might.

Here again the elements of the Greek drama once more confront us — the Fates, necessity. What at different epochs would have been the probable outcome of any attempt at withdrawal? That

ever, at any period of our history since 1790, a single State, — no matter how sovereign, even Virginia, — could alone have made good, peaceably or otherwise, a withdrawal in face of her unitedly disapproving sister States, I do not believe. Naturally, or as a result of force applied, the attempt would have resulted in ignominious failure. But how would it have been at any given time with a combination of States, acting in sympathy — a combination proportionately as considerable when measured with the whole as was the Confederacy in 1861? I hold that, here again, it was merely a question of time, and that such a withdrawal as then took place would never have failed of success at any anterior period in our national history. It was steam and electricity which then settled the issue of sovereignty; not argument, not military skill, not wealth, courage, or endurance; not even men in arms. Before 1861 steam and electricity, neither on land nor water, had been rendered so subservient to man as to make him equal to the prodigious, the unprecedented, task then undertaken and finally accomplished. In that case, might in the end made right; but the end was in no degree a foregone conclusion.

In my own family records I find a curious bit of contemporary evidence of this, and of the line of thought and reasoning then resulting therefrom. Following the foresight of Madison, J. Q. Adams, noting the set of the currents in 1820, became instinctively persuaded that the North and the South would be swept into collision by the forces of inherent development. Again and again did he put this belief of his on record. Contemplating such an eventuality, he, in 1839, thus expressed himself in a public utterance, in words which I have of late more than once seen quoted in support of the abstract constitutional right of secession. Speaking in New York on what was called the jubilee of the Constitution, or the fiftieth anniversary of its adoption, he said: "If the day should ever come (may Heaven avert it!) when the affections of the people of these States shall be alienated from each other, when the fraternal spirit shall give way to cold indifference, or collisions of interest shall fester into hatred, the

bands of political association will not long hold together parties no longer attracted by the magnetism of conciliated interests and kindly sympathies; and far better will it be for the people of the disunited States to part in friendship from each other than to be held together by constraint. Then will be the time for reverting to the precedents which occurred at the formation and adoption of the Constitution, to form again a more perfect union by dissolving that which could no longer bind, and to leave the separated parts to be reunited by the law of political gravitation to the centre." \*

In other words, forecasting strife, and measuring the coercive force available at a time when steam on land and water was in its stages of earlier development, J. Q. Adams regarded the attempt at an assertion of national sovereignty as so futile that, though he most potently and powerfully believed in that sovereignty, he looked upon its exercise as quixotic, and, consequently, not to be justified. A dissolution of the Union, at least temporarily, he believed to be inevitable. So strongly was he convinced of the power of the disintegrating influence as contrasted with the cohesive force, that the late Robert C. Winthrop, then a young man of twenty-seven, writing in 1836, described him as saying, in the course of dinner-table talk, that "he despaired of the Union, believing we are destined soon to overrun not merely Texas, but Mexico, and that the inevitable result will be a break-up into two, three, four, or more confederacies." "Inevitable"! The unexpected alone is inevitable. These two utterances were, the one in 1836, the other in 1839. In 1839 there were not five hundred miles of constructed railroad in the United States; steam had not been applied to naval construction; electricity was a toy. So far as he could look into the future, Mr. Adams was right; only — the unexpected was to occur! It did occur; and it settled the question. In 1788 the preponderance of popular feeling and affection was wholly in the scale of State Sovereignty as opposed

\* J. Q. Adams, *Jubilee of the Constitution* (April 30, 1839), p. 69.

to Nationality; in 1800 the Union was, in all probability, saved by being taken from the hands of its friends, and, so to speak, put out to nurse with its enemies, who from that time were converted to unity; in 1815 the final war of independence gave a great impetus to Nationality, and the scales hung even; in 1831 the irrepressible conflict began to assert itself, and now they inclined slightly but distinctly to Nationality, the younger of the two sovereigns asserting a supremacy; between 1831 and 1861 science threw steam and electricity into his scale, and, in 1865, they made the other kick the beam. But, when all is said, merely a fresh illustration had been furnished of the truth of that scriptural adage in regard to a divided service.

Such are the conclusions reached from a renewed and somewhat careful review of a record frequently scanned by others. They found in it the outcome of great orations, labored arguments, and the teaching of individuals. I cannot so see it. It is, as I read it, one long majestic Greek tragedy.

“ Like to the Pontic sea,  
Whose icy current and compulsive course  
Ne’er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on  
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,” —

so that great drama swept on to its inevitable catastrophe; — Fate and Necessity ever the refrain of its chorus, — until, at the end, the resounding clash of arms.

For better, for worse, a new era then opened. In what I have this evening said I have dealt with a past in which, as I see it, the forces of nature — “ the unseen hand at the game ” — decided the issues involved. But there are times also when men have their turn, both asserting and establishing their superiority over fate, — shaping destiny to their desires, — triumphing amid the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. In closing, were I to look for such a spectacle, I fancy it would not be in vain, nor would my search be far or long. I should find it here in the South, and not least in Charleston, in a manly adaption to unsought-for conditions, in the

resiliency of a vigorous race casting calamity lightly aside, — “a dew-drop from the lion's mane.” To what extent the issues of the past are bygone, my being here this night, and discussing them in this presence, bear conclusive evidence. And indeed, coming from Massachusetts to South Carolina, it glads my heart here to see, if I may in closing use the great language of Milton, “a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks; an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam.”

























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